

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Dr. A. Zachary Yamba - April 26, 1999

Q: It is Monday, April 26, 1999. My name is E. Alma Flagg. I'm an interviewer with the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Project. Today I am in the office of Dr. A. Zachary Yamba at the Essex County College in Newark. Good morning, Dr. Yamba.

Yamba: Good morning, Dr. Flagg.

Q: I'm so happy to be here with you this morning, and I appreciate your taking the time to have this interview for the Cultural Project. This is going to be a part of a collection at the Mansion which can be used by people who are doing research in the future. Will you begin by telling us where and when you were born, anything about your parentage.

Yamba: I was born in Ghana, September, 1948, with most of my education and part of my college education and training in Ghana prior to coming to the United States in 1961. My parents were basically civil servants, they also owned a farm. My father, in particular, served during the Second World War, and after the war he came back and joined the civil service and he was very active in the movement to obtain independence for Ghana. And that was really exciting times in those days especially when the ex-servicemen really joined with [?] when he came back from the United States to fight for independence for Ghana.

Q: What was the occasion of your coming to the United States?

Yamba. At the time of graduation, I had several choices. I could have gone to Sanfirst in England, the military academy, continued my education at the University of Ghana at Lagon, or coming to the United States. And somehow my parish priest convinced my parents that I should go to quiet, suburban Catholic school away from the military environment.

Q: I see.

Yamba: And so that's what brought me to the United States.

Q: So that was to begin college, or had you taken?

Yamba: I had already taken two years of college. But when I came to the United States, of course, I was an applicant to go to Seton Hall, and they were not familiar with the system in Ghana, even though it's similar to the system in Britain. I had to start all over again because they didn't know what credits you took and how rigorous the studying and so I had to do the whole of everything. So I lost two years, but I think it was worth the experience.

Q: I see. What did you major in?

Yamba: I majored in languages. I majored in languages, French and English, at Seton Hall University. But when I came to Seton Hall, my interest was mostly in teaching and administration. So I concentrated in those areas of teaching and administration.

Q: What happened after that?

Yamba: Well, after that, graduate school. I started to teaching at Seton Hall. I went to Kansas for a year, came back, I did some work in Canada, you know, doing some courses in linguistics. And then I taught at a high school in New Jersey, I taught at Ridgewood High School, and then back to Seton Hall. And then when Essex opened, I was recruited by then, Dr. J. Arrow Smith, who was an assistant to president at Essex, and Essex was just about open after 1968. So I came to Essex in 1968 when Essex opened at 31 Clinton Street in Newark.

Q: Imagine that, but you had been here since 68.

Yamba: Essex in 68, but the United States in 1961.

Q: I see.

Yamba: And, in fact, I used to come and visit the parish downtown Newark on Academy Street, Queen of Angels. And prior to the church burning down.

Q: What made you decide to remain?

Yamba: I think a series of events that took place in Ghana. [?] was overthrown. And there were a series of military coups. And somehow in the process, the leadership felt that my family really at risk, and so the message that I got was that don't return to Ghana. Things were really unstable at the time, and it really would not be in your interest. And I think also as the students were all very active and would have to submit proposals for new constitutions to democratize, and, of course, we all wrote our treaties. And so, I guess, some of them were trouble.

Q: You know it would be interesting to hear your impressions of the City of Newark upon your arrival. What you thought of the place, the people, the institutions? Because it was new to you.

Yamba: I was certainly landing at that time landing at that Idlewild Airport and Kennedy, and driving through the city because they had sent somebody to pick me up and we went through the city. And while [?], the capital in Ghana in my eyes was a big city, I mean, New York was something that I never in my dreams could have believed was so huge driving through that. And then coming through New Jersey. It certainly was different. And I think my initial impressions, especially in terms of Newark, I did not imagine that there were so many black people in Newark because the history books were somewhat silent about the black in America, the whole history of blacks in America. And so that really struck me rather vividly. You know, when I came, and I was impressed by that. And certainly, of course, living on campus at Seton Hall and coming to Newark on the weekends to attend church at Queen of Angels, I felt very much at home because

of the predominant black population.

Q: Actually by 61, which was of course before the riots, the city had already changed --

Yamba: That's correct.

Q: a great deal in population.

Yamba: Yes. Because I didn't know what happened in the 50s, but certainly by 61, you're absolutely correct. When I came, certainly I was impressed by that because none of the books and the materials that were given to me to read about New Jersey and certainly about Newark and South Orange, didn't prepare me to see so many black people.

Q: Did you take any notice of the institutions and the functioning?

Yamba: I was not much involved in terms of the political aspects. I think I was more in terms of the educational, and I found the educational system certainly different than the one I was used to. The educational system was far more open, far more analytic, and not so much less structure, but the process, I think, was far more friendly to students than the one I'd been used to. Cause mine, I was used to going to class, large lecture hall, the professor coming, lecturing professorial manner, and then walking out, and leaving you to study at the books. I mean, there was really no interaction whatsoever.

Q: I see.

Yamba: So the one to one relationship with the professor. And, of course, as I got to be a junior and senior, there was more seminars. It was more in a friendly relationship rather than teacher/student relationship.



Q: Your experience here at the college, what were your initial observations of the college? Students, faculty, and so on.

Yamba: Well, having been one of the founding administrative and faculty members, clearly one of the things that impressed me was we all came with a single idea for making it. We did not think that anything was impossible to achieve, and, of course, the height of the Civil Rights movement, the height of urban unrest, but the ideas that we had we were so sure that we could remake the world into the image that it should be.

Q: I know the feeling. You had great anticipation.

Yamba: That's right. That's right. Our students were challenging, demanding. That's one of the things that I have found over the past thirty years at Essex. The students in 68, 69 did not get no financial. You had to convince, you had to, you know, go toe to toe with them. And I don't know, something has happened in our society where students are now more willing to take teacher's word as gospel, not as challenging. And I don't know exactly what has happened in the intervening years.

Q: Which direction are you saying it has gone?

Yamba: It has gone in terms of they are more accepting of the teacher's word. Whereas in 68, the college students would challenge you on international issues. They wouldn't take the teacher's word as gospel. And so and in the writings you could see that. And I think part of it had to be, you know, the heightened awareness of the civil rights and rights of people and what was happening in Vietnam. And I think all of that had something to do with it.

Q: I see. And those people who were making all those challenges are now moving into.

Yamba: Part of the establishment.

Q: Not only that, but aren't they the ones who are referred to as the baby boomers?

Yamba: The baby boomers. That is correct.

Q: And now they're moving into.

Yamba: That's right. That's right. But also I think what I found at Essex and part of the movement of the community colleges, and Essex had its share. You also had a fairly adult population because, you know, some of the students were young, but not so young, because they were just coming out of Vietnam. And they were in their early twenties so they had other experiences to bring to the table. I also had students who were just recent graduates of high school. So we had that mixture.

Q: That sounds almost similar to the time that I began college, which was Depression years. And FDR had the ER, and emergency funds to college were a part of it. So that the student body consisted of young people who were just coming out of high school and mature, more mature people who wanted to get into college.

Yamba: And I think that clearly. And I think also the environment of Essex, I guess the nature of the founding in one building, we were all together in one building at 31 Clinton, which means you saw everybody and when there was a protest, there was no question that the protest would block the entrance to the building. And that was, that of course, was the huge mega-structure, multiple entrances, people are more disbursed throughout the building. And, so it has its drawbacks. Even though, you know, it's not big.

Q: Vertical.

Yamba: Yes. That's right.

Q: Do you find the students are, well, what do you find with regard to their preparation? Before and now.

Yamba: I think earlier, while we provided some remedial work, but I think it was a remedial work that was just a semester. It was more brush up. You know, things that students had missed in terms of English, but certainly in terms of the languages. What we are finding today, and unfortunately, I think it's been the situation for the past ten years, the preparation and the need for remediation is far more pervasive than it was in those early years. To the extent that nearly ninety percent need --

Q: What percent?

Yamba: Ninety percent. Need some type of remediation in English and math and reading.

Q: That's tremendous.

Yamba: It is tremendous. And it has become a major trial for Essex County College.

Q: So within the last few years, how has the improvement in both areas come about, and how has the attention of the students who have needed it.

Yamba: Well, I mean, obviously, as I test, you know, development, design and pour more and more resources into remedial programs, and put more into persistence. But clearly, when you look at the students at that level, from semester to semester, you find a very high rate of attrition. Now for us the attrition, besides the academic cooperation, I think students today are coming to us with greater social, personal needs. Single households, single parents. The economy is not as strong for them, and resources simply are not there. And so you get a situation where they are raising children, they are trying to go to school, and in some instances, trying to hold a part-time job. And it's a tremendous pressure. So that was very clear. What Essex has done, of course, we designed

all kinds of levels of remediation, and I'm hoping that they follow through step by step. Wanting to go through those steps, and coming here for two years, they do very well. But two years is a long time as an adult to be taking remedial courses. And we're trying to shorten it, but there's really no shortcut. What I've been trying to do also is perhaps if we can [?], so rather than a student coming in and taking let's say remedial English or remedial reading or remedial math, then also want them to take a course in history. There's no way you can do the reading and the writing that's required in a history course. You need to finish the basic skills first. And for some, it's frustrating. It's frustrating.

Q: And you would like to do that, have them concentrate more on a specific period on the build up that they need.

Yamba: Right. Right. And that means some structural changes, and that means you better courses in the traditional college mode, two days a week, three days a week. You know, we prefer maybe three or four concentrated time blocks to really master, because without the mastering of those fundamentals, you're just doing a bad. Yet, in spite of all of these things, those students who have persisted, you know, have done very well, and have graduated and they're making some significant.

Q: They must be serious in order to benefit from what you're giving them.

Yamba: Yes. And then some of the programs that students pursue are not easy, especially in the health sciences, where there are great advances, and our students manage to hold their own and they compete with the best in terms of success rates. But the support has to be there. They have to be willing to make those sacrifices.

Q: And, of course, if they are determined then.

Yamba: Then they will succeed. That's right. But again, the attrition rate is simply too high. It's



unacceptable. Our graduation rates are low. We graduate maybe five, six hundred, seven hundred students a year.

Q: Out of?

Yamba: Out of, we have a population of about eight thousand. Even if you divide it up evenly between both first and second year, maybe four or five thousand a year, that is simply too low. That is too low a number. And we're working with the students to make sure. But also we put some things in place, like centers with joint enrollment with NJIT. So a student whose SAT score may have been too low to get into NJIT Engineering School, and come to us and.

Q: And work serious.

Yamba: Serious work. And the joint admission. You make a GPA of 2.5 or better. When he graduates from Essex, you don't have to reapply, you're automatically admitted with a junior status. And I think that, you know, is a really major incentive.

Q: And they indicate that aim when they start.

Yamba: Oh yes. Oh when they start. Sure we tell them, you know, this is the path and this is what you need to do. You don't have the background. You need to take your Algebra, your Calculus. And you do very well, regardless of how badly you did on your SATs, you can get admission to NJIT, which is an excellent, excellent arrangement for our students.

Q: What do you find with your students with regard to their sensitivity, their awareness and thoughtfulness about their ethnic background? You might describe also the distribution of ethnicity.

Yamba: Yes. Right. I think they are very sensitive. Essex, I think, perhaps has students from

every corner of the world, every continent. In fact, in any typical day, classes are, in between classes, you stand on the second level of the main floor, and it is really an international scene. Students from all over. Certainly the majority, you know, are from here and the immediate area. But many from Central America, Caribbean, South America, many students from Africa. We are now getting a lot of students from Eastern Europe, because from everything that is happening, and Southeast Asia. So it's a real international school. Of course, we have an international students club. And there is I think great awareness of the diversity. Our student paper publicizes that. And, in fact, I think the editor of our student paper, I'm not sure whether he's from Jamaica, but certainly he's from one of the islands.

Q: I was reading one of those upstairs.

Yamba: And you could tell by the type of coverage, that the heavy Caribbean, you know, basis. A couple of years ago, the students who were writing for the paper were from Africa so that you had that slant in terms of the paper also. But clearly, open institution. Students are well received, well respected. And I think what we try to preach to both the students and the faculty is to not only to respect the diversity, but to value that. To value that and treasure them because that's what makes us an open institution because we are all cut from the same.

Q: You described the international organization which they had. Do they also have separate ethnic clubs?

Yamba: Some do. Some do. For example, the Caribbeans have their ethnic. The Middle Eastern Arab students, you know, have their club. But I think in terms of activity, they're trying to fold this under the international, you know, rather than the separate. From time to time, independent celebrations from different countries get together. You know, they're celebrating, you know, the nation's independence, the Ghandian independence or Greek independence. And this year for the first time, we participated with Rutgers and NJIT in the World International Day so the three colleges, you know, the students got together to celebrate cultures. In terms of food

and music and dance and lectures. And that was.

Q: And it certainly is very possible considering the physical layout of the several campuses here.

Yamba: That's right. That's right. And you'd see the students back and forth. And the cafeteria, you'll find students from Essex and vice a versa. And at NJIT in particular, because I was talking to the president, and I would say a good ten to fifteen percent of the junior college that transfers from Essex because many of the international students are Japanese. They said, it's like a waystation because they come to us for English as a second language, and they're very glad, you know, that.

Q: Let me ask you something. Recently I was walking out there on West Market Street, I see bodies of students, groups of students going back and forth between the college and the skill center. What kind of interaction do you have with the skill center?

Yamba: Basically what we have is that we provide the facilities of the students to fulfill their requirements for graduation. And so, our physical education is offered in that gym for the students to fulfill their requirements. In addition to that, we have a three plus two program that the neighborhood people generally come to the main building in the technical field. So those students can come over.

Q: Essex has no gym.

Yamba: No it doesn't. No recreational facilities whatsoever. And so we have sought and with the recertification and reaccreditation. But that has not been.

Q: I see. So they must have it.

Yamba: Yes, it's a requirement. That's right. It's a requirement. So we provide that. But in

addition to that, we have a three plus two where students on a particular track can upon finishing high school or simultaneously being in high school, they can be taking certain college courses.

Q: Do they have to be especially able?

Yamba: Yes. Yes. I mean, we don't call it gifted, but basically I think the motivation and they have to maintain a certain grade point average and towards a high school diploma, but they also have, depends on how many credits you're taking. It could be twenty, it could be thirty credits. College, which is transferrable to any college in New Jersey. So they're able to enter college starting at second semester freshmen. And then plus it's cost effective because they're not paying for it. And in fact, several years ago I think of the students who participated, maybe ten graduated, some of them got admitted into colleges in New Jersey, which under normal circumstances they would have needed at least eleven hundred SAT to get into it, and they were able to transfer to any college in New Jersey.

Q: And thereby hangs the payoff.

Yamba: That's right. That's right.

Q: That's very interesting. What do you see as the interactions between the college and the city?

Yamba: There are many aspects of interaction between the college and the city. Certainly, we have a very good relationship between the college and the Board of Education. Specifically, we're working very closely with [?]. Faculty members go there and provide additional instruction for. The students take some courses here in preparation for college.

Q: And your instructors go to the high school. What are they offering?

Yamba: It's mainly history. Certain disciplines specify that you need that added. But mathematics

also. But what happens is that not only do our instructors go there, but in some of the courses, the best of the honor students there. We do the same thing for Science High. And then the faculty members also get together, between our faculty members and the faculty members at Science, at Shabazz and Central to review the curriculum as well as define. You know, the end of second history should not be the end. It should start working to go separately. Therefore, how does this curriculum fit in with what is happening in the post-secondary. Because for far too long, and I don't have to tell you that high schools have done their things, and the colleges, you know, and this is what the textbook says.

Q: In separate boxes.

Yamba: In separate boxes. But let the professionals get together and they'll find out that [too low to hear] rather than fortunately accept the status quo. With regard to the city itself, Essex together with Rutgers and NJIT have this council of higher education in Newark. And part of our involvement.

Q: It is currently active?

Yamba: Oh yes. In fact, I've been chairing that for almost ten years now. We voted, but somehow, you know, we meet once a month.

Q: Does that operate the?

Yamba: No directly. No. Now the chance. You may be thinking about way back when they had the day care.

Q: Yes.

Yamba: Right. The name of this, we don't operate that way no more. There's a separate day care



center that we operate, but it's not called chance. Basically, at Essex we have our own day care center. But what the four colleges and universities are getting very much involved especially pre-college activities. Essex will work with Shabazz and Westside, Rutgers will work with. But within the city proper, beyond the educational, which is part of our mission, it's more the economic development, the quality of life, how can we make them better so that it's attractive for all. And very early on, you know, put on their, they came to the college and said well what do you think if something like that were to happen. And then they went to the city fathers, and said, listen, you know, that area, most of the land was vacant. [Too low to hear] And they said, yes, if decent housing were put up, we would let them. And so that gave the Hovnanians the incentive to go ahead. And there was a meeting in the Birch Theater. There were seven hundred people in the progress meeting. Education and people from out of town, you know, to come into the city. And basically, just want to walk into a, cause the residence knew progress in the area. So what are you going to do? Because the colleges, but in between look at what you got. And now they just made their private accord. You know, to bring businesses and industries into that.

Q: And housing.

Yamba: And housing. You know, but in addition to that collectively we've supported it and we've gone to the Legislature with it. What petition for a dormitory. So we had to petition because they were going to put everything in Rutgers. Newark is a major city. It has a law school, you know, and all these colleges and Essex is perceived.

Q: The college [cross talk].

Yamba: Exactly. Right. And here the commuters do fine, because that's our mission. [Too low to hear]. And then we started doing our. A college for that matter, but for a public community college to have a student center. [cross talk]

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: We had mentioned the student center which has been developing out there. Tell us what the outlook is.

Yamba: Well, right now, I think we are almost near the end of the completion of that building. We just awarded a contract for the back filling, also ordered a contract for the furniture. And the furniture is going to take anywhere from four to six weeks. But because we're getting to the summer months, we wanted to make sure that the administrators who will be running that building and some of the residual students who will be here for the summer, get to know the building. And then in September let everybody, all the faculty and the students come back, we'll have a grand opening. And, of course, our longing serving chair of the board of trustees who passed away several years ago.

Q: I remember the grand opening of the main building, the amphitheater.

Yamba: That's right. That's right. And then also again, so that's why. And, of course, two years ago we opened the center for technology on University Avenue. And again, it gives us trouble because the feeling in trying to was that we were serving an urban population while building a technology building. And like everybody else go out and compete with the rest of the world. And it's our responsibility, obligation to provide them with the necessary tools, and quality instruction so that they can go out and compete. And then, of course, the gymnasium, again, when this mega structure was built there was no gymnasium.

Q: From what I have read, you deserve considerable credit for moving the college along academically and in other ways. Your views certainly seem to be sound and progressive and geared for this population that you serve.

Yamba: Yeah. And then I've said that to the college community that I'm getting most of the credit. But I think that the community has been extremely supportive, the faculty, the students. Anytime we've come together for a quorum, I've received a lot of support. And I think that has

helped us. It's made my job that much, you know, easier whether I went before the builders, before the City Council, and other organizations to seek support for this college, people have really opened the doors and opened their hearts as to what the college is all about. And my hope and all of us is that to make sure those opportunities exist, continue for exist, for the sake of our community.

Q: I think that the population or the politicians or citizens are able to see the results of your work in some of the graduates who have gone and have become a part of the community, a productive part of the community.

Yamba: You're absolutely right. We're very proud of our graduates. And when I go to the hospital, I can remember one time, you know, I was in the hospital because [?] closed down in Orange, and I came to after surgery, I know these two nurses around me. And I thought maybe I was at the pearly gate, you know, and they all came down because they were graduates of our nursing program.

Q: Yes.

Yamba: And every hospital you go to within the county of Essex, you will find our graduates. Our physical therapy program, you will find our graduates there. And, of course, the students who finished Essex and have gone on to Rutgers Law School and Seton Hall Law School, and they're all practicing in this area, and many of them have also been elected to public office, and they're very active in our community. And so we're very, very proud of our graduates. We're really proud of them.

Q: While the students are with you, do any significant numbers take interest in the surrounding community and, you know, develop links or become interested in service of any kind?

Yamba: I think so. I don't have the listing. But certainly they're very much involved. For

example, some of the who live in the housing project, very active trying to open doors. You know, asking the residents to move out, come to college and take some skill courses. The student government, for example, especially during the Christmas season, they're very much involved in toys drives, you know, to help kids who are needy. Phi Beta Kappa, the honor society, get very much involved in blood drives also. And they volunteer their time to tutor elementary school kids or secondary school kids. So our students are very much involved. And then, of course, the traditional roles of the social worker, part of their requirement is to go out in the community, part of their so-called in service training. So our students are very active just like our faculty members and staff members are very much involved in their respective communities. And they serve on different boards to make sure that the good that the college is doing gets out in the community. But more important, they are providing an invaluable service to their community. They want to give something back, and we try to preach that to them. That no matter how high you are in the organization, whether you're a student or an administrator or a faculty member, you have an obligation to give something back. Even though many of our faculty got to know through our own.

Q: Well that certainly is very good. Because the idea of giving back is something is being invoked. Everybody who gets an education and makes something of himself or herself should want to do that.

Yamba: And again some of our faculty members are very much involved in the community. And city council graduated from Essex County College and very much involved in the community. One of the faculty members, [?] he has a church that he runs, is the pastor, in addition to a professor of sociology. So he's very much involved. And, of course, then, you know, faculty at different schools. And they're talking about African-American history, and he's a dynamic speaker, and he's always invited back, you know, to give some instruction to the student.

Q: Very effective indeed. From this vantage point, I'd like to hear your comments about the city and its future. What you see happening perhaps governmentally, physically, education wise, of

course.

Yamba: Well, I see major changes taking place in the city. And some of those changes I think will be for the better. But first and foremost, I think the educational system in terms of the achievement of our students and our kids, has to be paramount. Because without that, all the physical changes, all the development downtown is really not going to mean much unless we can improve the educational system. So that our kids go to a safe environment. Go to an environment where the highest levels of achievement are expectations across the board. Because without those achievements, they'll be lost. They cannot function in our society. Can't function in the society. So I see a bright future if those things happen. I think that the physical changes taking place are obviously more pronounced in the downtown area, but in the neighborhoods I see some changes also. I think those changes are much slower. That at least to me, I would like to see some concentration on trying to move the neighborhood development along much faster. I also would like to see some job creation because I think that more people are employed, and gainfully employed, the better. You cannot have a city where the majority of the people are unemployed. It simply just doesn't bode well for the city. I think the more jobs that can be created, and then, of course, with college education and skills, I think the older adults, the more stable the community will become. So I see all these things in place. Certainly the future looks good if everybody stays the course.

Q: I have to agree with you.

Yamba: They have to stay the course. That is critical. Because Newarkers talk about a lot of cities coming back. In my view, I think Newark has more to offer than some of those cities in terms of concentration of colleges, the transportation.

Q: Wonderful location.

Yamba: Absolutely. Location is incredible.



Q: And what some of us who remained here have observed over the years. So many things have gone out from the city. Well, the geography can't leave.

Yamba: Can't leave. That's right. That's right.

Q: Can't be taken away.

Yamba: That's right. And I think even when you travel, even people who live in New York City, they'd rather land at Newark Airport. Because Newark Airport is only ten minutes away from the city. Convenient. The layout is excellent. We have the seaport, the train. Again, I'm sure they're working at that. Because I'd like to see the Newark Penn Station look like what Philadelphia looks like, Washington looks like.

Q: They have all changed.

Yamba: Yes. You know, because you can spend a whole day at Union City just browsing around, shopping, eating. And I think Newark has the potential to do all of that. But more importantly, I think the concentration of colleges and universities really I think should be taken advantage of. Because you don't find too many cities with this many, especially the public education concentration. Because I serve on the Middle States.

Q: Okay, you're talking about the greater number of.

Yamba: That's right. And we travel. And I'm in our nation's capital.

Q: I have a thought. Oh, the redevelopments down on Broad Street of the national Newark and Essex buildings and the Lefcourt building. Is some development for student housing?

Yamba: There has been some talk about that, and, in fact, we have a meeting coming up the first

Tuesday in May. They're trying to get the colleges to buy into it. Now obviously like dormitories and they're probably need more space for graduate student living. And you have interns. Ours I think the interest is for international students because I think the housing stock in Newark is not as great as people can get elsewhere. It's really tough finding rooms for students who come to us from the international arena and want to come to the City of Newark. And I think again, the more we can get people to live downtown Newark, in this area, the quicker the city can come back. Because you cannot have a density of five or six blocks. You know, community life, and that life can be brought about.

Q: And it did exist before.

Yamba: That's right. And the city, you look at other cities, at the colleges, there's a night life and everything. At the University of Kansas, and this is way back when, went there on vacation, the city closed down. The movies closed down, the restaurants closed down. You came back after the summer, and then all the signs welcoming everybody. And I guess at one time New Brunswick was like that too. And probably it still is. And I think I would like to see the same thing happen.

Q: Well, you know, the high rise buildings of the Newark Housing Authority have been in the process of demolition and that has been advancing. And there's been more [?] housing by the Housing Authority. So that takes care of one level. Now what do you think of a level beyond those that need public housing? What possibility is there?

Yamba: Well, I think, you know when you drive around the city, I think you still see a lot of vacant, and maybe part of the master plan should really concentrate on some of the vacant lots and make sure that they are developed, whether you call them affordable or market housing. You know, with some support from the state and federal government, I'm sure that there is some support that the city can get. And I think that if those were done, I think things would really improve a lot. Because what I see happening is that you have the scattered housing as the high rises come down; however, within the same block or two block area, you have a vacant lot or a

blighted building sitting there. And somehow it looks incongruent, you know, with the development that is taking place. It's taking way. And with the vacant lots that exist, I think with the concentrated master plan, the city can force the issue because obviously developers want to make money. But I think once that housing could be developed, the better people will take care. [Too low to hear]

Q: Well I hope there will be some more of that category. Because we need more market-level housing.

Yamba: Because people are buying them. You know, cause when you look at what is happening on the outskirts, Orange, East Orange, and so on, you don't find too many houses that are not unsold. People are selling them. I think Newark can do the same thing. But I think it has to be some portion or development of the master plan, and enforcement of the codes. They have to enforce that. You just can't come in and build anything you want to build. You don't do that in suburbia and the city shouldn't allow that to happen either.

Q: Takes a lot of attention, but you're quite right. Codes have to be enforced.

Yamba: Because you buy a house. You're trying to maintain your house in your neighborhood. The block association. I think everybody has to pitch in. And once you do that, then it's, the neighborhood begins to take shape.

Q: Well, with all of this. Are we headed in the right direction?

Yamba: I think we are.

Q: And Newark will become a gem of the east coast.

Yamba: I think the potential is there. That enough people are willing who want to see this

happen. They will have to stay the course. I think we have to accept our differences, the politics and keep our eyes on the prize

Q: Eyes on the prize.

Yamba: Yes. Once we do that, you know, we're gonna to have a lot of difference, but at least we know we are going as a city. And as long as that happens, I think Newark will indeed have a bright future. Because it's my prediction that if we don't take advantage within the next three or four or five years and it doesn't happen, then another era is going to bypass Newark, and it's going to take a while to come back. Just like there was a period of development and we capitalized on that era. So the Baltimore, the Cleveland and so on. We can do it. Absolutely. The good will is there. The people are, you know, are here. And when you look at the tide of the upward migration. A number of professionals are really committed to the city.

Q: So you said eyes on the prize and education is the key. And people are our greatest resource.

Yamba: Yes.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much, Dr. Yamba, for sharing with us this morning. It's been a great pleasure and this will be a valuable addition to our archives.

Yamba: Thank you very much. I am honored to have been interviewed.

Q: Thank you so very much. This has been an interview with Dr. A. Zachary Yamba, President of Essex County College.

END OF INTERVIEW